

Evaluation visit to St Elizabeth's Primary School, South Lanarkshire

Title of the project: Embedding Spanish into the life of the school, P1-P7

Aims of the project

- To teach Spanish as L2 from P1 to P7, with an emphasis on integrating language learning into the life of the school, using L2 for classroom interaction where possible, and reinforcing language learning throughout the curriculum
- To create relevant and meaningful learning contexts for L2 through interdisciplinary learning.
- To plan collaboratively to ensure coherence and progression in the language learning experiences provided for all learners.

Discussion of self-evaluation paper: key messages from the school

Background

There were 10 classes. Staffing consisted of:

- seven FT teachers, all MLPS trained. Two had completed training that session.
- two job share teachers, one of whom had just completed MLPS training. The other had not been trained.
- two probationers sharing a class, with no MLPS training
- one FT temporary teacher, with no MLPS training
- two part-time teachers covering non-contact time, with no MLPS training
- the headteacher and deputy headteachers, both trained in Spanish

Not all trained staff felt confident in their use of the language.

Resources/methodology

The school was supported by the training, resources and linguistic expertise of Le Français en Ecosse (LFEE). The pilot programme offered a variety of engaging activities and resources, including activities which promoted cultural awareness, culminating in a Spanish Open Day. All resources were supported by helpful sound files to assist with pronunciation. The headteacher felt that all teachers had embraced the work of the pilot and that there was a clear shift away from teaching Spanish as a discrete subject to reinforcing Spanish throughout the day, as and when possible. Not all teachers found this straightforward but basic Spanish was being used in all classes. Teachers were using the language as part of their daily routines and some were able to give simple instructions in Spanish. Spanish was used to welcome and greet pupils/teachers/visitors, to take the register, to count, to order lunches and say prayers. Some teachers were also using physical education lessons as an opportunity to integrate some Spanish into games. This whole-school approach had provided opportunities for teachers, particularly those with no previous Spanish training, to develop their own skills at a steady pace.

Initially, the school followed set plans from LFEE but as the pilot progressed, teachers became more involved in adapting the plans to meet the needs of their own class. LFEE's linguistic expertise assisted them in this. They felt that this had led to

more meaningful learning experiences. Staff continued to have discrete lessons in Spanish as well as reinforcing the language across the curriculum. In doing the latter, support from LFEE had helped them with vocabulary, such as for art lessons.

Children's experiences and achievements

The school stated that children across the stages could read words, sentences and short paragraphs and answer questions related to a text, as in a Spanish quiz prepared by LFEE. Children as early as Primary 1 were making an attempt to write words in Spanish. The school stated that children were able to listen and respond appropriately to a variety of personal questions and could engage in meaningful dialogue with others. They felt that children were more 'tuned in' to coping with unknown vocabulary. The school had made a start to L3 with some French input from LFEE. Children at P7 had worked on a quiz prior to a visit to France.

Some grammar had been introduced as necessary through activities. The school recognised that the pilot work had not included sufficient reading and writing, although all children had been exposed to the written word and had done some writing. They intended to do more on those skills the following session.

Children had covered basic areas of vocabulary such as colours and numbers. Children at P6/P7 had also covered food. The following session, the school planned to do a Spain/Scotland comparative study to underline Scotland's place in the world. The school felt that children had enjoyed their language learning but needed more challenge, particularly at the upper stages. They would like to do topics in greater depth and felt that continuing support would help with this. They would like milestones to reach at stages from P1 to P7, to give a more coherent, progressive and in-depth experience. The school is now planning to forge closer links with the languages department in the associated secondary school.

Support for learners

The school felt that the whole school approach had contributed to developing both teacher and pupil confidence and in helping children accept that the use of L2 was natural in class. The use of games and songs meant that children had regular reinforcement of vocabulary and support from their peers.

Successes of the pilot (from the self-evaluation)

The school felt that staff at the early stages of their training and staff who had had no MLPS experience at all were nonetheless able to deliver the pilot successfully following training days with LFEE. Staff felt that this had been possible due to the quality of the support and resources from LFEE and SCILT. The termly support visits had provided opportunities for discussion around planning and for teachers and children to interact with native speakers. As a result, they felt that Spanish was part of life at St Elizabeth's Primary School and that overall, children were confident in engaging in simple dialogues in Spanish with their peers, all staff and visitors.

Issues arising (from the self-evaluation)

The school wants to build on the work undertaken during the pilot and provide pupils with more opportunities to engage in activities based on all four skills. However, in

order to maintain staff confidence, they feel they will need continuing support and guidance to deliver greater depth and progression in Spanish.

The original prescriptive planning had helped them use key phrases with more confidence but they recognised the need to move on from this and had begun to do so. However, in the next school year they would have four new class teachers who would not have been involved in the pilot and may not have had any MLPS training.

Overall evaluation by Education Scotland based on evidence during the visit

Overall, children were very engaged in language activities used to consolidate their learning. They were confident in talking in Spanish and worked very well in groups and independently across the stages, on tasks involving use of the language. At P1/P2 for example, they worked on a good variety of tasks linked to numeracy work. Children worked at a brisk pace and were keen to share what they had learned. Children were very positive about learning another language and wanted to learn more. They are confident in their ability to do so. They had enjoyed learning about the culture of another country and how it differs from their own. They were used to using Spanish as part of their daily routine and were proud of this. They talked positively about their link with a school in Barcelona.

Children working in groups supported each other and received support from the class teacher, with prompts in Spanish. Staff have displayed great commitment to working this way, despite a lack of confidence in some cases. Children coped very well with the activities set and many are now ready for even greater challenge. The school is aware of this and plans to do more reading and writing next session to enable most to achieve at second level in these skills by the end of P7. Children at P7 were beginning to put sentences together and this type of activity could be used elsewhere to provide more consistent challenge whilst still maintaining children's interest and enthusiasm.

The school had not yet begun to record children's progress through the Es and Os. In order to do this, the school should look to plan from the Es and Os, building in assessment opportunities. These would involve mainly naturally occurring classroom evidence in the four skills.

From observations in classes, children were showing very positive pronunciation skills and most were confident in their use of language. They understood their teacher readily in terms of classroom interactions and instructions. Reading was developing through games at the early stages, and writing through some copying activities and descriptions for classroom posters for example. There was scope to do more reading beyond word level. The Spanish quiz prepared for the Spanish Day was an indication of the kind of more complex reading activity that children can enjoy. Children were developing strategies for finding out unknown words and will find these strategies helpful as reading work continues.

In classes and at the school assembly, children were able to sing songs which included complex sentences and dialogue. Children at P5 were able to read their text in Spanish. Children also demonstrated their knowledge of sign language.

At P7, children demonstrated they were able to cope with basic dialogue about themselves and could talk about simple themes like the weather. They demonstrated very positive pronunciation skills. They were able to understand the meaning of some personal information in spoken Spanish and were able to work out words they did not know. Similarly, they were able to work out the meaning of a text in Spanish with personal information which included unknown vocabulary.

Children at P7 were introduced to French over a period of two weeks before a trip to France. While in France, they carried out a few tasks for which they had to use their understanding of a number of French words. While this experience was short, the children made connections between French and Spanish.

The school was considering a project for next session involving sign language or Polish since there are Polish parents linked to the school. They would welcome support in planning such a project to introduce L3.

Overall, children have had a very positive experience in working through the pilot project. They were confident, enthusiastic and keen to learn more. Their teachers are to be commended for their hard work and commitment in ensuring a positive outcome for the project.